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Committee on Conferences
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Draft report

Addendum

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II. Control and limitation of documentation

C. Translation-related matters

Introduction and overview

1. The General Assembly, in section B of its resolution 52/214 of 22 December 1997, expressed a number of concerns with regard to translation-related matters and requested the Secretary-General to take certain steps to meet those concerns.

2. In paragraph 28 of its resolution 53/208 B of 18 December 1998, the General Assembly encouraged the Secretariat to continue its efforts to ensure effective linguistic quality control through to the final stage of document production and distribution and to report to the Committee on Conferences on the steps taken in that regard.

3. At its 423rd meeting, on 1 September 1999, representatives of the Secretariat presented to the Committee on Conferences oral reports on translation-related issues and on linguistic quality control through to the final stage of document production.

4. At the same meeting, the Committee considered the report of the Secretary-General on the post of reviser (A/53/919/Add.1).

5. Also at the same meeting, the Committee witnessed a demonstration on computer-assisted translation by the Translation and Editorial Division of the Department of General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services.

Discussion

6. Concern was expressed at the quality of translation done by conference services. Even though translation was a creative process and the judgement as to what constituted a good translation was inherently subjective, there had been documented cases of inaccurate

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translations where the sense of the original text had been distorted. Every effort should be made to improve the situation through training and more effective quality control systems. The representative of the Secretariat pointed out that special emphasis was placed on the training of translators at the P-3 level who were earmarked for self-revision, and that even the work of senior translators was subject to spot checks. A system of peer review had also been introduced further to enhance the quality of translation output. Freelance translators, most of whom were former staff translators, were selected through a rigorous selection process.

7. In response to a question raised at the 421st meeting with reference to the share of revision work in total workload of P-5 and P-4 staff at United Nations Headquarters, Geneva, Vienna and Nairobi, the representative of the Secretariat explained that the statistics given in table 1 of document A/53/919/Add.1 excluded that portion of the workload that was generated by functions other than translation and revision, namely, managerial and supervisory functions.

8. Concern was expressed over the fact that the rate of self-revision exceeded the established benchmark, namely 45 per cent.

9. A number of delegations commended the Secretariat on the introduction of new technologies aimed at enhancing the productivity of the language staff of conference services.

10. The view was expressed that, while problems did occur in ensuring linguistic quality control through to the final stage of document production, such problems were relatively minor. Every effort should nevertheless be made to keep such occurrences to a minimum.

Conclusions and recommendations

11. The Committee took note with appreciation of the oral reports on the matters presented by the representative of the Secretariat.

12. The Committee also took note of the report of the Secretary-General on the post of reviser (A/53/919/Add.1).

13. The Committee requested the Department of General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services to continue its efforts to utilize new technologies, such as computer-assisted translation, terminology databases and speech recognition, so as to enhance further the productivity of language staff.

14. The Committee recommended that efforts should continue to be made to ensure that training opportunities were available to all language staff, including those at duty stations away from Headquarters.

15. The Committee recommended also that efforts should continue to be made to improve quality control at all duty stations.

16. The Committee expressed its concern that the rate of self-revision had exceeded the established benchmark.